

Report on Dissemination Activities (months 1-18)

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Topten ACT aims at transforming the European market of energy-using products towards higher energy efficiency. Topten ACT identifies the top energy-efficient products in 16 European countries, and makes this information available to consumers and large buyers on tailored national websites. The most energy efficient models in different product categories (such as household appliances, lighting, office equipment, consumer electronics, cars) are presented with comprehensive product information based on official labels and standardized declarations. Topten works with manufacturers and thus increases both market offer and consumer demand of high energy efficiency products. Topten is strictly neutral and independent from manufacturers and retailers, its selection criteria are always published online. Topten ACT is supported by the European Commission's research and innovation programme Horizon 2020, and many national organisations (energy agencies, environmental and consumer organisations, research institutes). The Topten ACT project involves 17 partners in 16 European countries. It is coordinated by ADEME (Agence de l'Environnement et de la Maîtrise de l'Energie). More information and access to all national websites on the European site: www.topten.eu

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Background

Topten ACT, through its network of 17 European partners, provides listings of the most energy efficient household products on the market, as well as cars and professional energy-using products. It aims to both educate consumers on the benefits of upgrading to more efficient models and facilitate actual purchases by forming partnerships with retailers of listed products.

Each national partner is tasked with promoting the Topten initiative through a variety of dissemination strategies. This report, covering the first 18 months of the project (March 2015 - August 2016), gives details of partners' activities to promote their websites and the Topten initiative in general, covering:

- Experiences of the different strategies
- Best practice examples of dissemination
- Challenges and barriers encountered to engagement

Dissemination Responsibilities

Partners have been assigned particular dissemination strategies, but activities beyond these may be carried out. As a minimum, these are assigned as follows:

	AT	BE	CH	CZ	DE	ES	FR	IT	LT	LU	NO	PL	PT	RO	SE	UK
Journalists	✓		✓	✓			✓	✓			✓		✓			✓
Press Releases	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓		✓		✓	✓
Social Media	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓						✓	✓	✓
SEO	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓				
Newsletters	✓	✓			✓									✓	✓	
Conferences						✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	
Videos/TV ads					✓	✓			✓				✓			
Competitions	✓					✓			✓			✓				
Partnerships		✓					✓					✓		✓		

Building a network of journalists

Partner Experiences

Of responsible partners, the level of engagement with journalists to promote the project was relatively high:

- 3 partners reported reaching out to over 20 journalists
- 10-20 journalists were engaged by 4 partners
- 2 partners had fewer than 5 interactions with journalists

It was encouraging that for 5 partners, more than half the journalists engaged were sufficiently interested in Topten to publish a story. 3 partners reported that fewer than half the interactions with journalists resulted in a story.

Lifestyle magazines were reported to be the media channel most interested in Topten with five of the partners successfully achieving coverage in this type of magazine. Guide Topten (France) fed back that short tips on product energy efficiency were generally preferred by this target group rather than larger articles. Some interest from the daily mainstream press was also reported with a common topic for this section of the media being consumer advice on energy labelling.

Partners from Norway, Germany, UK and the Czech Republic also reported success with gaining coverage in trade press.

Successes

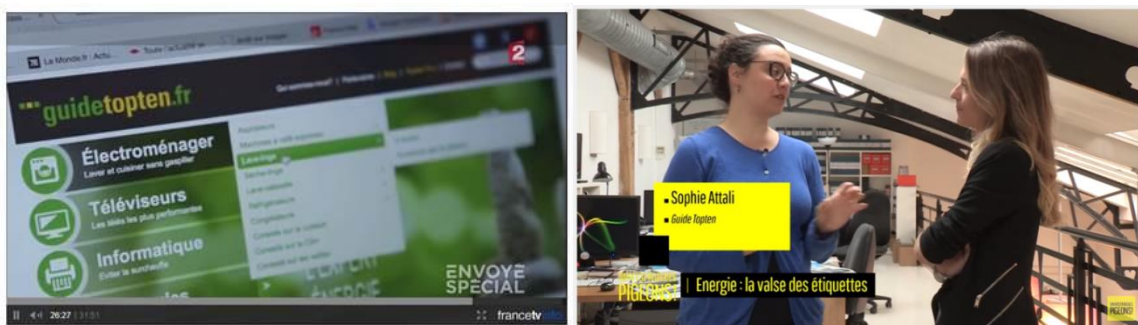
Significant publications that have featured articles on Topten in the first 18 months of the project include:

- Actu Environnement (France, 787,000 monthly readers)
- Il Sole 24 Ore (Italy, circulation 360,820)
- Saft & Kraft (Switzerland, circulation 750,000)
- Trends.be (Belgium, circulation 205,000)
- Stuttgarter Zeitung (German, 200,000 copies sold daily)

In December 2015, French partner Guide Topten was approached by journalists from France 2, the largest French national TV channel. The main brief of the programme, the prime-time magazine show *Envoyé Spécial*, was to enable experts to explain the energy label (suggesting that consumer confusion is still present in this area) but this also gave valuable exposure to the project, as the programme has an estimated audience of 2.5 million viewers. The choice of Topten for this programme demonstrates the project is a necessary mechanism in simplifying the process of helping consumers to find efficient products. This opportunity arose as a result of Guide Topten's relationship with a press agency which publishes releases and speaks to journalists afterwards.

Guide Topten were also interviewed for other national TV shows: this consisted of an appearance on France 4's *On n'est plus de Pigeons* in October 2015 (targeting a younger demographic, with an audience of 400,000 viewers), which included an interview and a liveTweet. A further appearance took place on *C'est au Programme* in June 2016, a morning talk show on the France 2 station (with again an estimated 450,000 viewers). This programme featured Guide Topten commenting on consumer's trip to an appliance shop which was secretly filmed. Again, the slot gave high visibility to the Guide Topten website.

The combined effect of this TV coverage had a large effect on web hits for Guide Topten, resulting in just under 32,000 web hits for the month of February 2016; Guide Topten has averaged around 14,000 monthly web hits since the start of the project.



Screenshots from French national TV features on Guide Topten - *Envoyé Spécial*, left, *On n'est plus de Pigeons*, right

Other partners found a product specific approach was the most effective for engaging journalists; for example in the Czech Republic, providing guidance on 100W light bulb replacements, still perceived an area of confusion for consumers, and an interesting market development was reported as effective and led to multiple articles being published. In Portugal, journalists were more interested in the energy efficiency credentials of cars rather than household goods (possibly with the profile of

environmental performance of cars having been raised by the VW-gate scandal) and the greatest success was reported as being with this product group. In Italy, partners reported that a timely linking with an Italian government scheme to promote furniture purchases had the effect of increasing the number of articles published. In Germany, a success was achieved with the monthly magazine Öko-Test which now regularly features their top ten listings of green energy tariffs.

Partners reported a constant theme that journalists were more interested in a money saving angle rather than energy savings. Adding a new product category to a website was also reported as providing an interesting newsworthy story for journalists.

In addition, the Austrian Energy Agency (AEA) reported that journalists had been interested in stories related to market surveillance of products in the first 18 months of the project. The effect of VW-gate has no doubt had an effect on the level of interest in the validity of products' energy performance claims.

Challenges

Partners generally fed back that journalists did not show a particularly high level of interest in the subject matter of Topten and that the process of turning information from listings into a relevant story was often challenging. Energy efficiency is not perceived as a particularly accessible consumer topic or as engaging as other environmental topics such as fracking or the VW emissions scandal. Öko-Institute in Germany fed back that while journalists consider Topten a useful resource, as a concept, it does not always generate new news stories.

National experiences showed further barriers; in Norway it was reported that consumers generally engage more on energy saving from heating rather than appliances, perhaps due to lower national electricity prices. In Italy it was reported that the media landscape does not give a great deal of space to stories on energy efficiency. Overall, it was perceived that energy efficiency was a lower priority in the national news for journalists and only likely to be included when the main news agenda was quieter.

Conclusions

Despite the relatively low priority of household product energy efficiency, there were some promising interactions with journalists and the fact that more than half the partners were successful in getting over 50% interactions with journalists to result in a story suggests that if provided at the right time, there are opportunities to reinforce messaging on energy saving products in a simplified way. One partner reported that relationships with journalists that were bolstered when partners also interacted with on Twitter. Even when journalists did not produce articles specifically about Topten, partners reported being able to position the project as an expert in the field of energy labelling, which remains an area where consumers still require explanation.

Targeting lifestyle and home/interiors magazines appeared to the best means for gaining press coverage in the first half of the project.

Writing Press Releases

Partner Experiences

Key moments that were identified by partners that gave rise to press releases were as follows:

- Changes in energy labelling regulations (CZ, DE)
- Introduction of a new product category (CZ)
- Co-ordination with a national and government energy initiatives (PT, IT)
- Seasonal trends (eg promoting air conditioning during hot weather, Christmas gift purchasing) (IT, ES, NO, DE, PT)

Partners targeted a wide range of channels with press releases; as mentioned in the journalist network section, lifestyle magazines were a popular channel, but partners reported making press releases through a variety of print and online sources. A fairly common theme for events accompanying press releases appeared to be legislative changes, and an area where journalists were keen to pick up the story.

Successes

EuroTopten.it (Italy) reported that the press release promoting air conditioning was their most successful, resulting in a 50% increase in web visitors for that month.

In Spain, WWF promoted Topten using the concept of “Green Friday” for buying efficient products (as in ‘Black Friday’); this was found to be a good means of promoting Topten, resulting in around 20 articles.

In the Czech Republic, SEVEN found publicising the launch of the category of 100W replacement LED bulbs was successful and had the best organic reach of articles put out: web visits were around 5-6 times higher, and 4 articles were published on the back of this.

Oko-Institute in Germany received one of their best media responses in March 2015 for an article on their listings of wood heating pellets through the DPA press agency.

Increasing web visibility on search engines

Partner experiences varied on whether website visibility had increased since the start of Topten ACT. Partners from France and Italy have seen a general increase since the start of the project compared to the last round (Topten Max). In Italy a significant increase in web visibility was seen between month 1 of the project and month 18. Conversely, partners from Germany, Poland, Luxembourg, Spain and the Czech Republic noticed little change or even a slight decrease in their search engine positioning.

For increasing web visibility, partners identified a number of factors driving this. Regular updates to websites were cited by partners from Poland and the Czech Republic. In Austria and Italy, using Google Adwords was considered to have been beneficial - it was estimated by Eliante that this was increasing visitors by 30-50%. Further to this, Italian media activity and partnerships had also helped to increase web visibility.

AEA also reported that using certain keywords that were prechecked on Google Trends enabled a better hit rate on Google. Most partners reported that linking their news feed with social media was an effective strategy. A few partners also reported getting other organisations and companies to add direct links to their Topten websites from their websites.

All partners use Google Analytics to monitor visitor number to the website, some partners also use Twitter analytics, Facebook statistics, Piwik, KANTAR media, Retriever and Meltwater to monitor visitor activity. Partners used these tools to monitor website visits, unique visitors and amount of time visitors spend on site, referral clicks, bounce rate, visitor loyalty and average number of pages viewed by session.

Challenges

In terms of general barriers to web visibility, partners cited unattractive graphics and low-responsiveness of the web interface being used for partner Topten sites. A lack of compatibility with current user behaviour was also cited; as websites were generally not set up to be mobile or tablet friendly this was thought to be reducing the traffic through that medium and having a knock-on effect on search engine rankings.

Although all of the partners are able to use tools like Google Analytics in order to monitor website traffic, some feel that they are not using them to their full advantage, there is also an opportunity for partners to use these metrics to improve their website and make it more attractive to visitors.

Most partners carrying out this activity reported that social media and news generation from websites were linked, with the exception of France, who reported that only 1% of traffic was coming from social media sources compared to 70% from organic searches.

A common theme reported by partners was that the new CMS, due to be deployed by most partners in August-October 2016 would have the effect of increasing web visibility for a lower cost, due to improving several features mentioned above.

Competitions for consumers and manufacturers

FEWE, the partner in Poland and the Austrian Energy Agency, reported running competitions in the first half of the project.

FEWE's competition promoted energy efficient windows and doors, which engaged 58 manufacturers with the project. The competition was not aimed at consumers, but offered manufacturers the opportunity to receive a Topten 'accreditation' and the opportunity to use the Polish Topten logo. FEWE are currently arranging a similar competition for boiler manufacturers.

AEA ran 8 competitions in the first 18 months of the project which were entered by around 1,500 participants on average. AEA also ran a daily 'advent calendar' competition at Christmas with a daily quiz and chance to win prizes - this was very successful and attracted 19,400 participants, with positive feedback from entrants. AEA reported household appliances manufacturers as being the most engaged in competitions, with TV companies appearing the least engaged.

Producing videos and TV advertisements

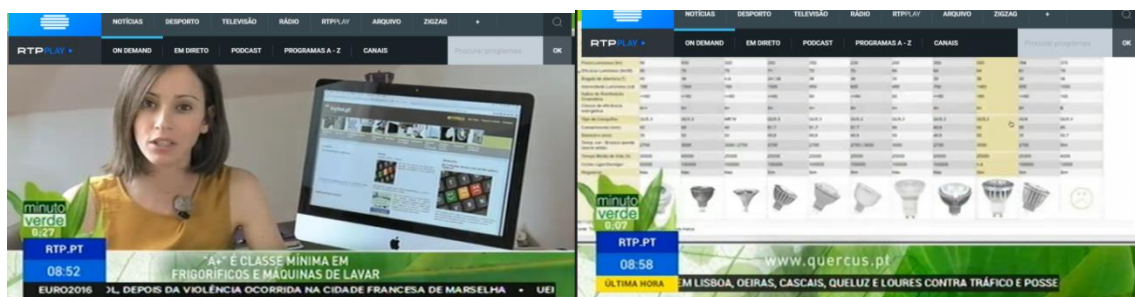
Experiences

Partners in Spain and Portugal reported making videos or TV appearances to promote the project. The Spanish partner, WWF Spain, made a short website video, aimed at an age demographic of around 25-40. This was released in combination with a report and a social media campaign and yielded 1400 website visits on the day of release (Topten Spain usually averages around 180 web hits per day).



Videos produced by Topten partner, WWF Spain

In Portugal, Quercus appeared on the 'Green Minute' section of national TV news. This section is well-known to the public (an estimated 500,000 viewers) and reaches a demographic of consumers with purchasing power. The appearance had the effect of boosting website visits (755 website visitors were recorded on the day of release, against a daily average of around 100). It was thought that using less technical information in the piece made this more accessible to consumers.



Appearances on national TV by Portuguese partner Quercus

Conclusions

Both the video and TV appearance proved to be an excellent means of raising the project's profile and increasing web visitors. The Spanish video was able to be produced on a relatively low budget of around €1,400 and took around two months to make - this provided engaging content for the project. Further use of this medium, with accompanying social media promotion appears beneficial.

Building a social media presence

Partner experiences

All the partners who responded to the survey are using Facebook as a way to promote the project.

Austria, France, Luxembourg Spain, Belgium, UK and Czech Republic are also using Twitter. Out of these two social media platforms, the majority of partners cited Facebook as the more effective for promoting the project.

Building on existing followers has been challenging for all partners. Most of the partners inherited these social media accounts from the previous phase of the Topten project, so they do not know how the original follower base was created. There has been some use of paid-for Facebook promotions in attempt to boost number of followers.

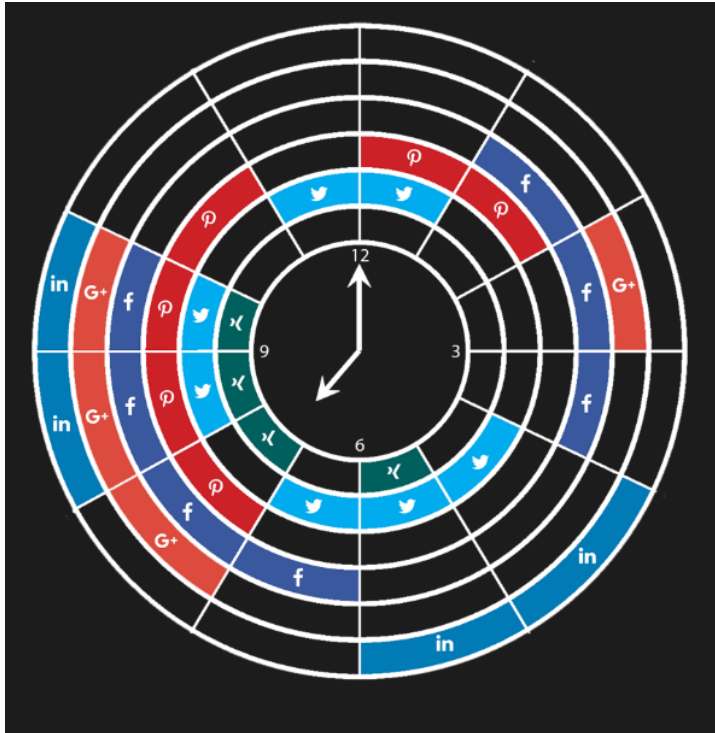
Most partners are updating the content on Facebook between once and twice per week. Twitter is updated as and when there is something to tweet about, so it can vary from several tweets per day to one tweet per week. On the content, the partners use a variety of formats including videos, images, links to other sources of information, tips on sustainable living and graphics. France and Czech Republic found using infographics has been quite successful. France also mentioned that content on reduction of food waste and general waste, has been more popular than posts relating to energy efficiency. Italy also noted some success when the content related to a questionnaire, that if users responded to they would be entered into a prize draw.



Infographics used by Czech Republic partner SEVEN on Twitter

Some partners stated that posting new content on social media during weekday afternoon and evening has worked best and generated a stronger response from the public. Romania and Spain mentioned timing the publication of new content before big events, or relating it to the change in seasons and temperatures, has generated a good response from the public. In the UK and Austria, scheduling tweets for different times of the day (including on weekends) was reported as a good strategy for building a following and improving visibility.

In the UK, EST has attempted to use certain hashtags on Twitter, but with mixed success; there are few regularly used ones that are particularly applicable to Topten. EST report frequently tagging tweets with hashtags such as #energyefficiency and #LED, and also trying out others not directly related to the project, but more widely used, such as #circulareconomy. Another strategy trialled was to use trending or popular hashtags and adapt Topten twitter content to fit these.



(Left) Peak timings used by AEA to post on various social networks. (Right) Tweet by EST utilising the popular #ThrowbackThursday hashtag.

Presently the partners do not have a strategy for targeting certain audiences or influencers, however this is something that they are interested in doing. With support on guidance on how to do this, partners can aim to target specific audiences with specific types of content, in order to boost awareness of the project.

Some partners have used paid-for Facebook advertisements, which have had mixed success. Italy noted the increase in views, likes and visits was not high enough to justify the cost of the advertising. Whereas Sweden noticed that their Facebook advertising boosted the number of visitors to their country's website quite significantly. Austria has also noted some success with using Google Adwords and also post boosts on Facebook, which have worked relatively well.

Challenges

The main challenge that the partners have had with social media, is that their Facebook and Twitter following is growing very slowly. Other challenges include not having time to frequently update the content and also not have ideas on the type of content.

At the moment none of the countries have a specific strategy for social media use, however they have been trying out different approaches to see what might work best. There is an opportunity here for partners to learn from each other's previous activity and start formulating a social media strategy based on these learnings.

Also, the partners' ultimate goal is to drive people to their country's Topten website rather than just increase their social media presence.

Presenting Topten at relevant conferences and seminars, and participating in professional exhibitions and consumer fairs

Partner experiences

Most of the partners do promotion of the Topten project at a variety of events; round tables, seminars, conferences, fairs, press conference, exhibitions, workshops and schools. These events have a mixture of audiences: field experts, researchers, technicians, press, general public, students, teachers, manufacturers, industry professionals.

Challenges

Some have found these events useful in promoting the website/project and have observed a link between presence at these events and an increase in website hits, whereas others have seen no link at all despite high footfall at these big fairs and events.

Partners have found it challenging to predict whether attendance at an event will help boost website visitors. However many have seen benefits in terms of making connections with other organisations that may help promote and to support the project in other ways.

Producing and distributing electronic newsletters and other promotional materials

Partner experiences

Types of promotional material that have been used to date include; leaflet in credit card format, leaflets, brochures, electronic newsletters, posters, bookmarks, air conditioning guide, quiz, folded energy savings on a wheel, flags. These are mainly distributed at events, talks, seminars, fairs. Most of the time this is not very often, but some have said they distribute materials about three times a month. In Germany, Oko-Institute has been disseminating newsletters around every 3 months, but plan to increase the frequency to monthly for the second half of the project.

Challenges

Success has been mixed with some not seeing any improvement in websites hits and others like Portugal saying that these materials have been successful at engaging with students and young people. Others say that stand alone emails, postcards and leaflets have attracted the least amount of interest, because they get lost in the numerous amount of leaflets and emails that an average person receives.

Establishing links to existing communication campaigns of environment/consumer organisations

Partner experiences

The partners have been tying in the promotion of their Topten websites with other organisations' campaigns. The collaboration has entailed mentions and links on other organisations' websites and mentions in publications.

Austria have established links with Energie Leben, Bewusst Kaufen, Bewusst Haushalten, Wir Leben Nachhaltig, Durch Blicher, Energie Burgenland, VKW, EVN and The Climate Alliance.

France have established links with ADEME and WWF. Poland have made links with the Polish Climate Coalition, three energy agencies (BAPE, SAPE, DAEiS) and Katowice City Hall. Belgium have made links with Bond Beter Leefmilieu, Ecoconso, an environmental consultancy, Vito, a sustainable development research organisation and Netwerk Bewust Verbruiken, a network organisation. Romania have linked up with, CNR-CME, the Romanian Member committee of world energy council for sustainable energy, who work on promoting efficient energy use in Romania. In the UK, EST has made links with LOCASE, a low-carbon business network and grants programme in the South of England and Quercus have information on Topten featured on the DGEG (Directorate-General for Energy and Geology) webpage.



Topten information on the DGEG website in Portugal

Successes

Some partners have seen that links to their website from other organisations' websites has worked very well in driving up website visitors.

These partner organisations have been most interested in the fact that the Topten website presents appliances in list format and the fact that it can be used as a procurement guide. In Austria organisations have been most interested in LED testing results, labelling and ecodesign information and product recommendations.

Summary of best practice activities

A number of effective activities were seen in the first half of the project that could be replicated or built on for the second half.

In terms of the timing of press releases, and their association with other events, some of the most effective strategies seemed to be when issues related to ecodesign and energy labelling were in the news already. Upcoming legislative changes such as the stage 3 phase out of mains voltage halogens, and the revision of the energy label back to A-G with accompanying database should offer strong opportunities to promote Topten in the second half of the project. Some of the best interactions with journalists were reported from lifestyle/household magazines, which should remain a focus going forward. Whilst Topten's overall message may not always be the highest priority energy-related news, it appears that journalists see product energy efficiency as a story that is relevant to a large audience and can be revisited frequently. The fact that 5 out of 8 partners reported a success rate of over 50% for getting articles published is encouraging.

TV and video appearances by France, Spain and Portugal were highly effective and tapped into large, mainstream audiences. Securing a prime spot in this way is certainly difficult to achieve, but building relationships with agencies that may be able to position consortium members as the expert when a mainstream story is required has been an effective strategy in Portugal and France. In Spain, the video produced provided accessible and engaging content and was effectively promoted through multiple channels - this concentrated promotion resulted in almost eight times the usual rate of web hits.

Only four partners are responsible for competitions, but AEA's experience suggests this strategy could be expanded. AEA's regular competitions were well subscribed to with an average of 1500 entrants and one attracting over 19,000 entrants. Running competitions as a series seemed to work well for maintaining engagement over a period of time.

Finally, whilst it may not be considered the most powerful tool at partners' disposal, on search engine optimisation (SEO), the use of Google Adwords appears to still be effective for slowly building stronger web visibility. Maximising this with assessments of keywords on Google Trends also appears to have worked well in AEA's case.